

Queen Creek History



QUEEN CREEK TOWN CENTER 1986

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From Rittenhouse to Queen Creek

If you're passing through the Queen Creek area, you're bound to come across Rittenhouse Road – a northwest/southeast diagonal path that travels along the railroad tracks, taking you from Higley to near Combs.

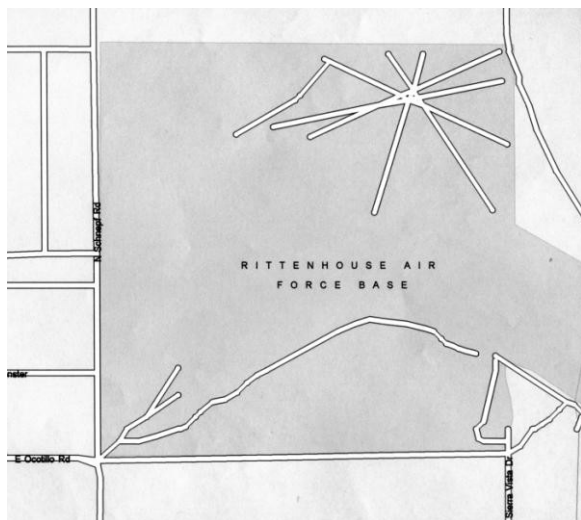
So, who was Rittenhouse and what landmarks are still remaining with the name?

In 1924, a land developer named Charles Rittenhouse established the Queen Creek Farms Company on 1000 acres of desert. He put in some of the first wells, wells that could pump 2150 gallons of water per minute. The availability of water made possible cotton, plums, apricots, alfalfa, grapes, and more. And soon, a little town began to develop around the railroad siding established to ship the produce and cotton. The town was called Rittenhouse until 1947, when a new post office was established under the name of Queen Creek.

Also, in 1924, construction of a new schoolhouse began on Ellsworth Rd, one half mile north of the Rittenhouse railroad siding. The new school, to be named after Charles Rittenhouse, would be a three-room building, constructed of Arizona red brick with white trimmed transom windows. The wood floors were tongue and groove, and the blackboards were real slate. Two roll-down room dividers separated the three rooms and a small stage was equipped with an abbreviated fly loft. The Rittenhouse School served the community until 1982 and is now home to the San Tan Historical Society museum.

We're all familiar with the phrase 'Touch and Go,' usually a reference to a precarious situation in which the outcome is doubtful. But for pilots training at the Rittenhouse Air Force Base during World War II, touch and go patterns were a part of their everyday routine; hopefully not a flirtation with disaster. The Rittenhouse Air Force Base, one of five satellite airfields supporting Williams Field, was located six-and one-half miles east of Queen Creek where Ocotillo Rd. intersects with Schnepf Rd. The airfield was used to conduct training in twin and four engine bombers and single engine fighters. It consisted of a set of four paved runways, the longest being 4,000 feet, arranged in a triangle. In the late 1960's, the northwest/ southeast runway was lengthened to 6,200 feet. It was apparently abandoned between 1966 and 1971, but still had an operating VOR beacon - a somewhat elaborate navaid configuration for an abandoned airfield. The old Rittenhouse airfield got a new lease on life in 1999, when the Rittenhouse Army

Heliport was once again listed with the FAA as an active military facility under the control of the Arizona Army National Guard. The only listed runway being a 1,500 foot asphalt section of Runway 12/30, which is described as having "potholes and loose gravel on runway." The Rittenhouse Airfield was occasionally used until 2003 for training by the Arizona Army National Guard helicopter crew from Papago Army Airfield in Phoenix.



Rittenhouse Elementary School

In 1924, construction of a new schoolhouse began on Ellsworth Rd, one half mile north of Rittenhouse. The new school, to be named after Charles Rittenhouse, would be a three-room U-shaped building, constructed of Arizona red brick with white trimmed transom windows. Two roll-down room dividers separated the three rooms, and, a small stage was equipped with an abbreviated fly loft. Over time, however, changes were made to accommodate the needs of the growing community that we now know as Queen Creek. The stage was removed to make room for Home Economics classes, and, the roll-down dividers were hidden behind solid walls. But thanks to the dedication of the San Tan Historical Society volunteers, visitors to the museum can begin imagining the facility as it once was. The old school was placed on the Arizona Historical Registry in 1990 and accepted by the National Register of Historical Places in 1998. It is the uniqueness of the roll-down room dividers that ensured our place on the Historic Registers. Supported by steel shafts, the wood panels roll tightly into a box above each opening. Three steel springs on each side of the shaft provide the tension for ease of rolling and un-rolling. There are no counter-weights, like you may find in the window frames of old homes. Over the years the springs have weakened, but thanks to a little cleaning and tender-loving care, they are again in working order.



Historic Town Hall

In 1949, the new Queen Creek ward of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints began without a meeting house. The school district allowed the ward to use a barracks building located on the school grounds until a new chapel could be constructed. Soon after the organization of this ward, it became quite evident that the number 13 was destined to become the lucky number for the ward and its membership.¹ The bishop was born on a Friday the 13th. The first ward meeting was held on March 13th. Groundbreaking ceremonies for the new chapel were carried out on April 13th, 1951, just 13 months to the day from the first meeting of the ward. And, the first meeting in the new building was held on Mother's Day, Sunday May 13th, 1951.

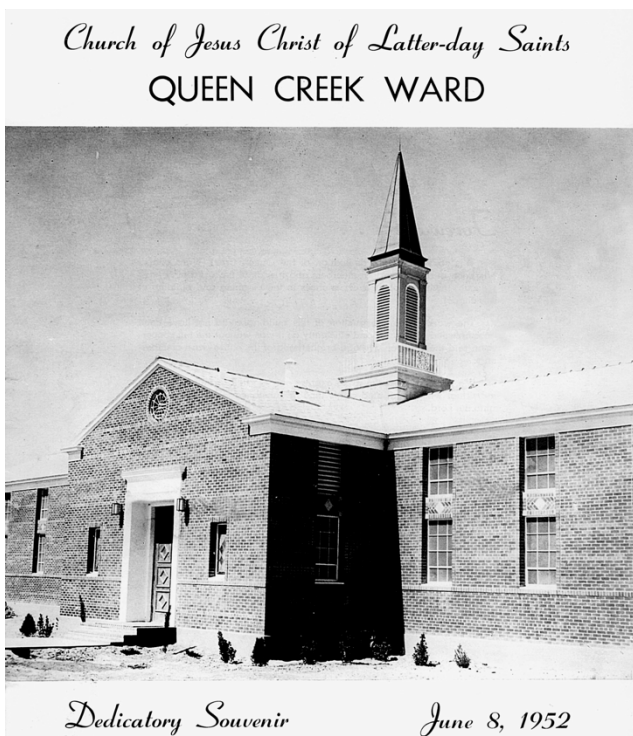
The new chapel became a reality through contributions of labor, land, and money. One fund raising event attracted statewide attention. The event was a big cotton-picking day on the Earl Brown farm. Services of 14 cotton pickers were donated to pick 80 acres of cotton in a single day. That day the machines earned \$2,600 for the building fund. When dedicated in 1952, the meeting house building and the adjoining athletic field with its lighting system, plus the landscaping project, represented an investment of approximately \$100,000.² The Queen Creek ward held its last meeting in this chapel in March 1989.

On November 7, 1990, the community leaders authorized the purchase of this building for the Town of Queen Creek – the deed was signed in February 1991. Located just south of Ocotillo Rd, on the west side Ellsworth Rd., the stained-glass windows in its Council Chamber make this Town Hall very unique.

Excerpts from the following were used for this article:

¹ Dedicatory Souvenir Program, dated June 8, 1952

² Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Queen Creek Ward history souvenir, dated December 1980



Origin of Street Names

How often have we driven down a street and wondered the origin of its name? For many of our local roads, we can thank the families that settled in the shadows of the San Tan Mountains. Their stamina, tolerance for inconvenience, and passion for success has been the foundation for these communities.

In 1914, everyone but John and Mathilda **Germann** knew that it was impossible to farm on the desert of Arizona. The Germanns purchased a relinquishment of 480 acres from a discouraged homesteader and established their home and pumping plant. In 1917, J.O. **Power** moved to the Queen Creek area with a brother, Bernard (Buck). Their homestead consisted of 320 acres and was located a half mile east of what is now Power Road on Ocotillo.

Jasper **Sossaman**, his mother, and his brother Lee, moved to the homestead in 1919 after his father died. It consisted of 320 acres on what is now the S.W. corner of Sossaman and Ocotillo Roads. Jasper (Jap) began working for Charlie Rittenhouse, operating and maintaining the diesel engines that powered the pumps used to irrigate Queen Creek Farms.

Johnny **Crismon**, moved to Queen Creek with his wife Margaret in 1946. They partnered with several other farmers in growing lettuce and carrots. Queen Creek's first school, an old muleskinner cook shack was located ½ mile north of Queen Creek Rd on the west side of what is now Crismon Rd.



Ernest E. **Hawes** started farming in Queen Creek in the 1930's. The original homestead was on the south side of Chandler Heights Rd., north of the Sonoqui Wash, just west of what is now Hawes Rd.

Charles **Rittenhouse** was well established by 1924 with the Queen Creek Farms Company. The wells typically pumped 2150 gallons of water per minute and were 400 ft. deep. The availability of water made his 1000 acres of farmland very productive.



In 1928, the Rittenhouse property was sold to Leo **Ellsworth**. He and his brothers formed The Ellsworth Brothers Farms, an operation that soon consisted of cotton, large acreages of farm produce, cattle, sheep, and a dairy herd. Leo is credited with bringing in the first phone line to Queen Creek.

Early Hohokam Settlers

When farmers began cultivating the desert area near the San Tan Mountains in the early 1900s, they regularly uncovered artifacts from the past - pieces of pottery, stone tools, and more. These were often considered nuisances and were tossed to the side of the fields or discarded. For a few, like the Brooks family living in Queen Creek, these artifacts represented a time of historic significance; a prehistoric time when an ancient people farmed this desert area. Mina and Robert discovered many stone tools and pieces of broken pottery lying in the fields and along wash banks. They ensured that these were preserved for many to appreciate in the years to come.

We were preceded in this area by a people the Pima called "Hohokam" meaning the "vanished ones." Scholars generally agree today that the Hohokam evolved from an earlier local hunting and gathering culture. Archaeologists date the earliest sites of these pioneering desert dwellers to around the time of Christ. By A.D. 700, the Hohokam were thriving in numerous farming villages around south-central Arizona. Their culture reached a climax between A.D. 1100 and 1400, after which, for reasons still unknown, it declined.

According to articles published by Suzanne K. Fish, an ethnobotanist and research associate at the Arizona State Museum, "these prehistoric farmers developed strains of beans that were heat, drought, and insect resistant, and quickly maturing corn varieties that avoided the risks of an extended growing period in the desert. Their beans included tepary beans, common beans, lima beans, and jack beans. They also raised squash and pumpkin, from which the flesh and seeds were eaten, and bottle gourds, which were used as containers. In addition, cotton was grown as a source of textile fiber and for the oily cotton seeds, which were toasted and eaten. The Hohokam added to the productivity of their agriculture by transplanting selected desert perennials such as agave or century plant and possibly cholla. When baked in a pit, stored nutrients in the plant base are converted to a sweet, pithy food. Fibers in the leaves can be extracted to make string, rope, nets, and coarse cloth."

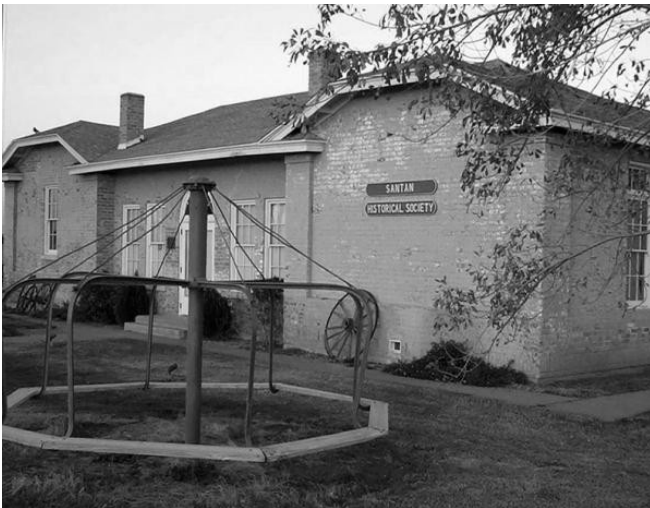


Frances Brandon Pickett

Ever since one cold November night in 1927, **Frances Brandon Pickett** has been a contributing influence to the Queen Creek area. She was born at home to Charles and Laliar Brandon, in a building that had been once been an old mule skinner's cook shack. Frances grew up loving the outdoors. She remembers constructing toys from whatever she could find; the desert was her playground. Sometimes small cans would be buried to collect insects that crawled at night. And then in the morning, the makeshift traps were checked for bugs. Frances and her brothers liked to pretend that the bugs were cattle, and they were taking part in a round-up.

But it wasn't all fun and games. Frances and her brothers were expected to help with chores and the farming. One time when Frances was about five, she was allowed to drive the mules alone to the cotton gin. The mules had made the trip so often; they knew exactly what to do. They pulled onto the scales, and after the wagon was weighed, the ginner gave a command to 'getty-up.' The mules proceeded to the gin's suction pipe where the wagon was emptied. Another 'getty-up' was given and they were on their way back to the cotton field. This is a memory she'll always treasure!

But when Frances entered school, she felt that the fun times had ended. She hated school, for it robbed her of the freedoms she'd cherished. Frances lived for recess and the noon hour, even though she had to walk a half mile home for lunch. She didn't mind, for it offered an excellent opportunity to be tardy or to skip her afternoon classes. Sometimes she'd find a nice shady greasewood bush to take a nap and delay her trip back to school; trying to time her waking with the end of classes. When she was caught at this trick a new one was tried, like pretending she couldn't see the words in her reader. After being fitted with glasses, yet another scheme was quickly created. Frances soon discovered the excuse of having a bad headache worked the best, for they never really knew when she was telling the truth. But over time she discovered that with the right teacher, school could be fun and rewarding. Years later, Frances became a teacher at the Rittenhouse Elementary School; the same school that she avoided as a youngster and the same school that is now the home and museum for the San Tan Historical Society.



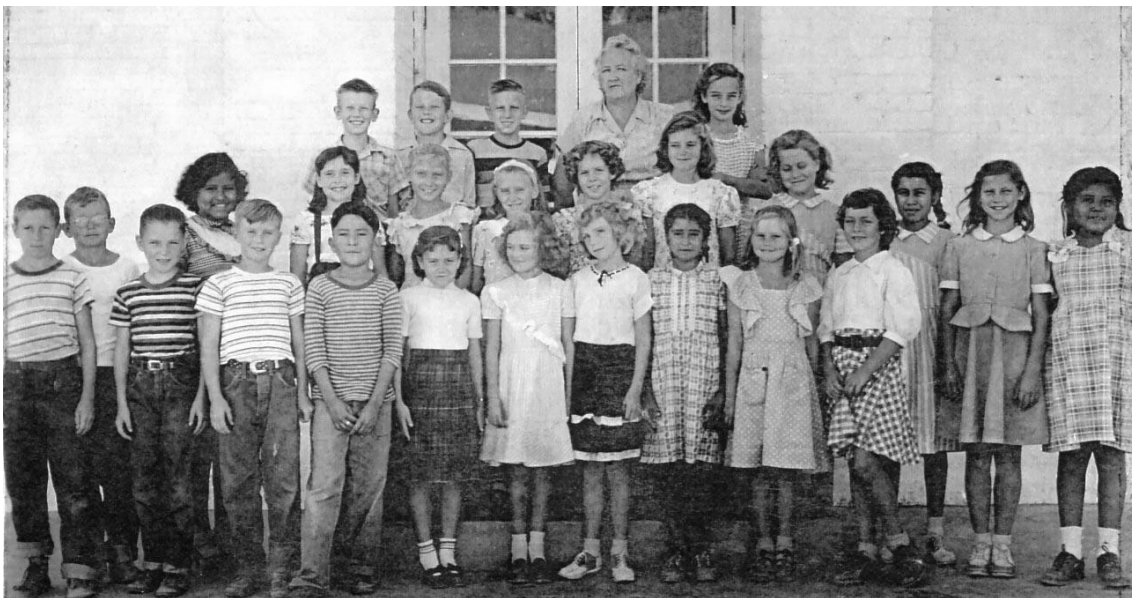
Wright's Market

According to an article from the Historical Society archives, entitled *Wright's Market At Queen Creek Robbed Of \$900*, "...the night of March 31, two unidentified persons broke into Wright's Market at Queen Creek making off with the safe and its contents valued at more than \$900. The culprits, it is reported, entered the store through the

The year was 1949.

- Barry Goldwater was elected to the Phoenix City Council.
- A new Dodge could be purchased for under \$1800.
- Jacquelyn Mercer from Litchfield, Arizona, was crowned Miss America. She was the last Miss America to be born somewhere other than in a hospital.
- Motorola's Arizona presence was established.
- Heavy Spring run-off from melting snow caused minor flooding on the Gila River.
- The National Trust for Historic Preservation was founded. It has demonstrated how preservation can play an important role in strengthening a sense of community and improving the quality of life.

And these bright eyed young students were attending 4th grade at "Old Main."



Rittenhouse Water Tower

Whether you were living in the Midwest or the Southwest during the 1930s and 1940s, the Dinky was a common method of transportation. And Queen Creek was no different. Sometimes referred to as the Doodle Bug, this early version of the commuter train typically consisted of only one coach and an engine that made daily runs to-and-from Phoenix. There were also several freight trains that ran weekly on this route, carrying equipment and returning with ore from the mines.

We're told that there were three railroad sidings along Rittenhouse Road. These sidings were short side-tracks that connected with the main line. The Queen Creek Station consisted of a brick house and a large water tank, with a well and gas-operated pump underneath. This was located at the southernmost siding, across from what is now Schnepf Farms. The building is gone, but the water tank still exists.

A second siding was at the Ellsworth Road crossing and was used heavily for loading produce. This was also the site of a World War II prisoner of war (POW) camp, which operated on the north side of the tracks from 1942 and 1945. German POW's provided farm labor, and a doctor at the camp was known to have occasionally treated local residents. The third siding was located across from the Boys Ranch (Rite of Passage's Canyon State Academy). One would assume that passengers would load and unload at the sidings, but according to local folklore, residents usually just flagged down the Dinky from anywhere along the tracks.

Emory Shahan once shared a story about his grandfather, James Montgomery Shahan. James came to Queen Creek in 1932, where he was employed as the Section Foreman by the Pacific Railroad. Mr. Shahan's job was to check the tracks and keep them in good working order at all times. After every rain one could hear the little gasoline motor car running up the tracks checking the rails for any flood damage. Should the track be damaged, there would be a crew sent out to make the needed repairs. According to the story, the tracks were held in place by cross ties and railroad spikes. Every cross tie was marked with a date-stamped nail. In this way, old ties could be checked and replaced as they became too old to support the traffic.



The Year was 1941

The year was 1941. It began with the inauguration of FDR for a third term; Henry Wallace was his Vice President. The year ended with the tragic attack on Pearl Harbor, and, President Roosevelt's message to Congress (Dec. 11th) requesting recognition of a State of War with Germany and Italy.

If you were here in 1941, you may have started your day with Arthur Godfrey's morning show. For those that liked country music, Gene Autry had his own radio show, the *Melody Ranch*. And don't forget the Andrews Sisters, singing "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy." The great band-leaders, like Glenn Miller ("Chattanooga Choo Choo") dominated the charts. Movie theatres were featuring the new Walt Disney movie, "Dumbo," or Orson Welles' "Citizen Kane." And how about that Joe Louis? The boxer defended his title in seven fights that year.

A new car could be purchased for \$850, with a gallon of gas selling for 12 cents. Stopping at the Chandler Heights Trading Post for a loaf of bread would cost you 8 cents; a gallon of milk was 54 cents; ten pounds of potatoes, 22 cents; a two-pound jar of mustard, 10 cents; and, shaving cream was 15 cents. Oh, and don't forget a copy of the Chandler Heights Weekly for only 3 cents. The October 4, 1941 edition the paper tells of the Gila River flood, where a farm woman climbed a tree to escape the raging torrents. Unfortunately, so did three rattlesnakes. After fighting off the snakes for twelve hours, she was rescued unharmed.

And at the Rittenhouse Elementary School, Faith Sossaman was teaching a 2nd grade class.



San Tan Shadows

In 1924, construction of a new schoolhouse began on Ellsworth Rd, one half mile north of Rittenhouse. Classes were being held in an old cook shack that had once been used by muleskinners to clear the land.

The new school, to be named after Charles Rittenhouse, would be a three-room U-shaped building, constructed of Arizona red brick with white trimmed transom windows. The oak floors were tongue and groove, and the blackboards were real slate. Two roll-down room dividers separated the three rooms and a small stage was equipped with an abbreviated fly loft. In 1936-37, rest rooms and two more classrooms were added to the rear of the existing building. The first heat was by steam from a boiler room under the floor with radiators in the rooms. The rooms were then equipped with oil heaters, but these were later replaced with gas heaters hung from the ceilings.

The school was placed on the Arizona Historical Registry in 1990, accepted by the National Register of Historical Places in 1998, and is undergoing restoration by the San Tan Historical Society.

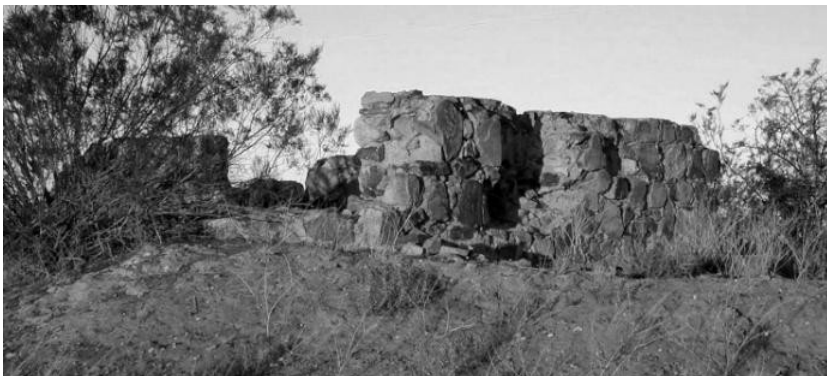
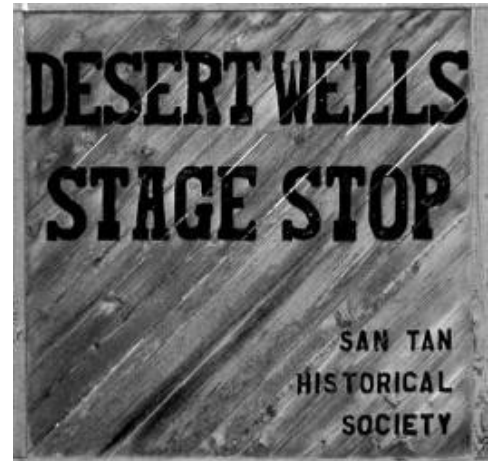


Desert Wells Stage Stop

According to USGS maps dated 1904, a historic road passed by a well on Andrada's Ranch. The homesteaders called the site Desert Wells; and according to folklore, it was a stage stop for the Arizona Stage Company operating from 1868 to approximately 1916. Freight and stage companies often had arrangements, honored on a handshake with ranchers, for use of local wells and outbuildings.

The Desert Wells Stage Stop was described by the early settlers as a simple one room building about ten-foot square, constructed of rock and mud, with a thatched roof and awning - a style very similar to Pima Indian dwellings of that time. There was a trough running around three of the sides, which was used for watering the horses and mules. The awning shaded the short walk to the well on the south side. According to the homesteaders that have passed along stories about this site, it had one four-foot door and small gun ports instead of windows. Anecdotal tales of discovered bodies and gunfights with Indians continue to nourish the imaginations of many in the area who visit this site three quarters of a mile south of Ocotillo Road, on the east side of Sossaman Road.

Even though this was a small spur stop, it holds a significant role in history and folklore of the area and is treasured by communities in the shadows of San Tan Mountain.



Who was Mansel Carter?

Some stories are so special, that we never get tired of sharing them. And the story of the Man of the Mountain is one of those. Mansel Carter (1902 – 1987) made his home on Goldmine Mountain, where he had filed mining claims for 40 years.¹

Growing up in Ohio, he worked for a while as a mechanic and then left home for Indiana where, among other things, he flew a shuttle service with his airplane. He traveled West during the depression and worked on the Zuni Indian Reservation as a logger before going to Idaho; leaving there in 1941 to settle in Gilbert. While managing a photography business, he became friends with the man who delivered ice; a Cherokee Indian from Oklahoma named Marion Kennedy. The town soon became too crowded for them, so they moved to the San Tan Mountains in 1948 to try their hand at mining. They worked their claims for silver and copper until Marion died in 1960.

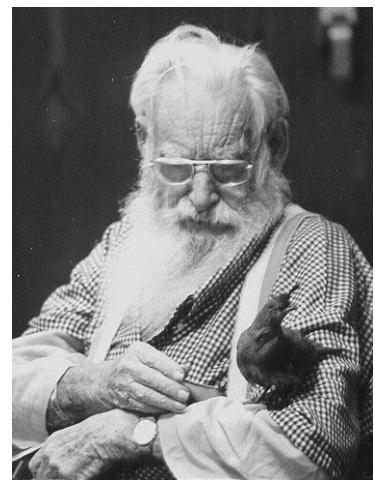
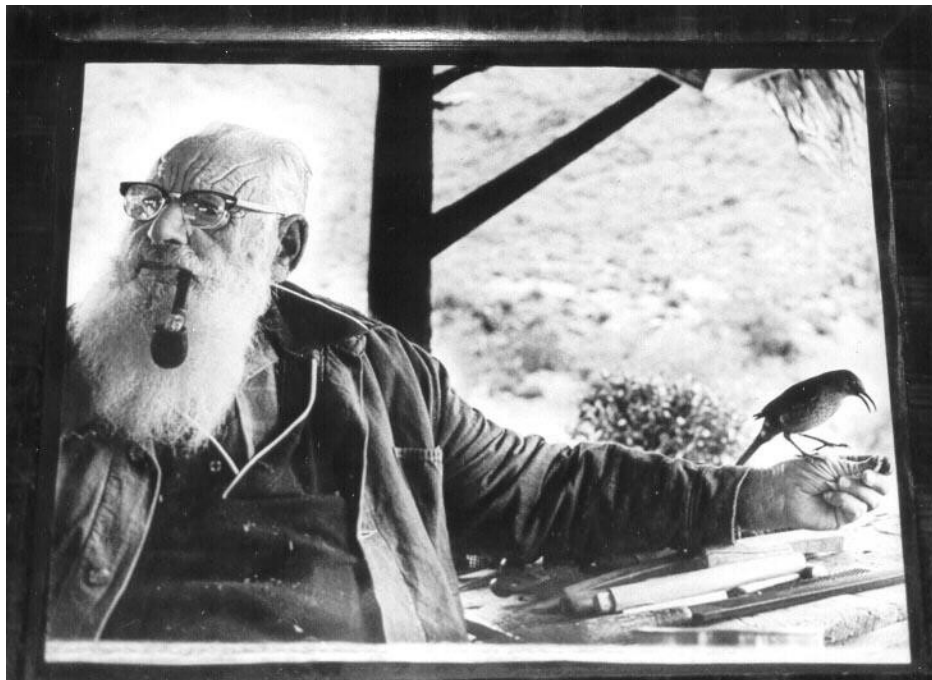
Mansel then started making his “cactus curios,” small carvings from cactus and wood. Over the years, he became a genuine celebrity; welcoming visitors from all over the world. He had a way with small birds and animals; a respect and understanding that can only come from the heart. A reporter once wrote, “Carter, who wears thick eye-glasses and has a long white beard, placed a bit of food on his finger-tips and called out, ‘come on.’ A woodpecker poked its head around a pole, landed on Carter’s fingers, and snatched the piece of food.”²

His guest book, cactus curios, and many of his personal items are on display at the San Tan Historical Society’s museum. And the gravesites of Mansel and Marion reside in San Tan Regional Park. To view the graves, drive South of Empire Road/Hunt Hwy on Wagon Wheel Road, and continue on Skyline Drive to the trail head parking lot. It’s approximately a quarter mile hike from there.

Excerpts from the following were used for this article:

¹ Chandler Heights Monthly, June 20, 1987

² Arizona Senior World, December 1986



Potatoes in Queen Creek

Potatoes have played a significant role in Queen Creek's agricultural foundation, as far back as the 1930s. The potato, one of our most important food crops, came under cultivation in South America more than 2,000 years ago. Potatoes, of which there are hundreds of varieties in every shape, size, and color, are classified as a cool-season crop; and, can be found in all 50 States. Potato harvest time in the San Tan Mountains' region was a big event. In years past, school children would often be released from classes in the middle of May to participate in production; picking up the potatoes, working/grading at the sheds, or baby-sitting so that the parents could be available to work. The potato sheds gave many young people the chance to work each summer; and for many, it is remembered as their very first job. In the late 1950s, Frito-Lay came to the area and established agreements with several of the farms for new varieties of potatoes.



The Queen Creek Potato Company had endured over the years with the cooperation of many local farmers; shipping over 400,000 cartons of red and golden table potatoes coast-to-coast each year. Pinto Creek Management, Inc. used a clever marketing spin for their Lost Dutchman Gold potatoes, "Now you can enjoy a treasure of your own. From our farm at the base of the mighty Superstition Mountains we are proud to offer the golden nuggets to you and your family."

As recent as May 2004, we were all reminded of the upcoming flurry of activity at the potato sheds, and, encouraged to take advantage of their excellent selections of fresh potatoes.

To view some of the old equipment donated by Barney Farms; used for successful potato harvests in the past, visit the outdoor display at the historic Rittenhouse School, home and museum of the San Tan Historical Society.



Queen Creek Wash Flooding



Water racing through a wash following a heavy rain is not usual in the desert. But it's hard to imagine that the communities along Queen Creek actually faced serious flood problems from overflow years ago. The impacts were highlighted in a report by the Queen Creek Flood Control Project and submitted for a War Department Hearing on October 6, 1937.

One local farmer reported, "On Sept. 16th, 1925, a flood came down over this entire acreage, three feet deep, damaging 210 acres of cotton... In March 1926, the water came down over new plowed land, ready to plant, washing same, had to relevel, costing \$250. Last part of July 1930 had a crop of hay out, and ready to bale; was a total loss due to flood of 250 ton of hay at \$7.00 per ton. Then in Sept. of 1933 water run over these tracts, which was in alfalfa, three feet deep, washing ditches and scalding out alfalfa, causing me to reseed same at a cost of \$10.00 per acre." Another farmer was very detailed about his losses from the July 1936 flood: 1 sack chicken feed, \$1.50; 1 sack cotton seed meal, \$1.46; 4 hens, \$4.00; ½ ton baled hay, \$4.00; 1 acre alfalfa killed by flood, \$25.00; 10 tons hay in windrow washed away, \$50.00; 30 tons hay in windrow ruined by standing water, \$90.00; 10 acres cotton damaged @ \$10 per acre, \$100.00; and, 1 ton useable fertilizer washed out of stock pens, \$1.00.

Although surveys were completed prior to WWII, the

War Department's United States Engineer Office didn't release their flood control report until February 1946. It concluded that despite previous efforts to redirect overflow, a serious flood problem still existed; that adequate flood control could be provided by a dam and basin; that water could then be released from the flood control basin at a reduced and more nearly uniform rate; and, that the flow would be extended over a longer period, thus increasing natural recharge of the underground basin. The resulting recommendation was that the United States adopt a project for construction of a dam and basin for flood control at the Whitlow Ranch site on Queen Creek, Arizona; that the United States pay the entire first cost of the flood control dam and basin estimated at \$1,561,000 for construction and \$84,000 for relocation of existing utilities; that the United States maintain and operate the improvements at an estimated cost of \$7,800 a year; that local interests adjust all claims concerning water rights arising from the improvements, and hold and save the United States free from all claims from damages arising from construction and operation of the works; and, that Federal funds sufficient to complete the flood control improvements be made available in one allotment.

Despite all of the improvements made dating back to the early 1900s and the additional engineering recommendations authorized in accordance to the Flood Control Act of June 22, 1936, the area still experienced flooding for many years to follow.



1930 Census

In 1930, Mrs. Laura Fellers was a widow at the age of 54, working as a farm laborer in the San Tan area with three children; Clara, age 21; Calvin, age 19; and Juanita, age 13. Jose Urquidez, age 31, a farm laborer from Mexico was married to Stela, age 19, of Arizona.

A census has been taken in the United States every ten years since 1790, and the 1930 census is the most recent one available to the public due to the Federal Privacy Act that prohibits the release of a federal census for 72 years after it is recorded. Cataloged by the Enumeration District within each county and state, the Queen Creek and Chandler Heights areas were included in the Higley District. All of the census records have been microfilmed; and, most have been indexed by various companies, historical societies, and genealogical societies.

Census records are far from perfect. Some were destroyed or lost, including the entire 1890 census which was destroyed by fire in Washington D.C. in 1921. Everyone was not included in the census process, either because they were not available or due to carelessness of the census taker. In one census, a person might be listed by their middle name and in the next by their given name. When Stella Tatum recorded the 2,137 people of the Higley District, did she spell all of the names correctly? How about a person's age or place of birth; is her handwriting clear enough to avoid mistakes? After thirty plus years of researching census records, Russ Rickards is amazed by what he finds in these records. Russ, a volunteer research consultant for the San Tan Historical Society, has created an edited census report for the San Tan Historical Society that lists name, sex, race, age, relation to head-of-household, marital status, place of birth (POB), father's POB, mother's POB, and occupation. Were you or your ancestors a resident of the San Tan area in 1930?

To learn more about the histories of Queen Creek, Higley, Combs, and Chandler Heights, and view the Census Abstract prepared by Russ Rickards, we encourage everyone to visit the historic Rittenhouse School, home and museum of the San Tan Historical Society. This census abstract may be a valuable source of information for those who lived or had ancestors living in this area in 1930. It will also provide information about where family members may have lived prior to Arizona and where they were born.

1930 CENSUS – HIGLEY DIST. MARICOPA, AZ

<u>Name</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Relation</u>	<u>Marital</u>	<u>POB</u>	<u>F-POB</u>	<u>M-POB</u>	<u>Occupation</u>
Tatum , Stephen B.	M	W	50	head	M	TN	TN	TN	farmer
“ Stella A.	F	W	47	wife	M	TN	TN	TN	none
“ Bayard	M	W	22	son	S	TN	TN	TN	“
“ Edward C.	M	W	20	son	S	AZ	TN	TN	“
“ Irene	F	W	15	dau	S	AZ	TN	TN	“
“ George D.	M	W	16	son	S	AZ	TN	TN	“
“ Lloyd A.	M	W	12	son	S	AZ	TN	TN	“
“ John A.	M	W	11	son	S	AZ	TN	TN	“
Tatum , George M.	M	W	73	head	wd	TN	VA	TN	farmer
“ Lora	F	W	44	dau	S	TN	TN	TN	none
Hokit, Ben L.	M	W	55	head	M	TX	MO	TX	teacher
“ Vina	F	W	48	wife	M	AR	AL	AR	none
“ Verdie E.	M	W	21	son	S	OK	TX	AR	farm labor
“ Claude	M	W	18	son	S	OK	TX	AR	none
“ Lester	M	W	16	son	S	OK	TX	AR	“
“ Willard	M	W	12	son	S	OK	TX	AR	“
“ Floy	F	W	6	dau	S	OK	TX	AR	“
Hokit, Earl O.	M	W	25	head	M	OK	TX	AR	farmer
“ Ruth	F	IN	27	wife	M	OK	(Choctaw)		none
“ Lewis B.	M	IN	8	son	S	OK	OK	OK	“
“ Virginia E.	F	IN	6	dau	S	OK	OK	OK	“
“ Frances M.	F	IN	4	dau	S	OK	OK	OK	“
“ Beda	F	IN	2	dau	S	OK	OK	OK	“
“ Emanuel	M	IN	3 mo	son	S	AZ	OK	OK	“

Queen Creek in 1954

Now here's an age-old question; why does time seem to go by faster as we get older? Imagining a vision of our community fifty years in the future is almost incomprehensible; but, looking back fifty years is something we often find comforting and enjoyable. So, let's reflect on what was happening in the community of Queen Creek fifty years ago. Queen Creek had changed its name from Rittenhouse only seven years prior and wouldn't be incorporated for another thirty-five years.

- The desert was being cleared of brush and trees for the farming of cotton, grains, and vegetables – a huge undertaking to establish the foundation of our economy. Therefore, it was a huge loss when the monsoon storms of 1954 washed away more than 100 acres of carrots and other crops, plus a huge section of railroad. The new car, that probably cost around \$1,850, could be driven to town for 22 cents a gallon. Make sure the roads were dry and you knew the way, however, because most of the roads were still dirt and had no name.
- *I Love Lucy*, *The Jackie Gleason Show*, *Dragnet*, *You Bet Your Life*, and *The Toast of the Town* were the five most popular shows on television, which could now be enjoyed while eating one of Carl Swanson's first TV dinners. To compliment the meal, a loaf of bread sold at Wright's Market on Ellsworth Road for 17 cents; a bottle of milk for under \$1.00. The Academy Awards for best picture, best director, and best actor all went to "On the Waterfront;" although, *White Christmas* was the most popular movie of the year.
- At the Rittenhouse School, Mr. Homer Elledge was in charge to ensure that his teaching staff was instructing the students on current events, such as the invention of the polio vaccine by Jonas Edward Salk that year. He may have also been wondering about the impact to education with the recent Supreme
- Court ruling against racial segregation in schools. And let's not forget the cafeteria staff, Mrs. Braicher, Mrs. Elledae, and Mrs. Bunch. Not in fifty years, could they have imagined that low carb recipes would be all the rage someday?



Information Courtesy of San Tan Historical Society
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Ellsworth Bros. General Store

According to an article from the Historical Society archives, dated July 1, 1943, "...a huge fire completely destroyed the Ellsworth Bros. store and gasoline service station in the community of Rittenhouse. A Maricopa County deputy sheriff stated that the driver of a Signal Oil truck was filling the service station's gas tank when a spark from a small pump being used to pump the gasoline into the tank ignited the fumes, severely burning the driver and causing the gas truck to explode. Flames completely devastated the building."

Back in 1920, when the town of Queen Creek was still called Rittenhouse, Charles Rittenhouse owned a thousand acres of cotton, grapes, and plums. Within a few years, however, Charles was faced with financial troubles – grapes and plums weren't very profitable. It was Mr. Rittenhouse's financial problems, therefore, that presented the opportunity for the Ellsworth brothers – Leo, Larence, and later, Donald. In 1927, Rittenhouse Farms became Ellsworth Bros. Ranch. The Ellsworth brothers expanded their cotton crop and added other farm produce – carrots, lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower, and potatoes.



The Ellsworth Store and Service Station, which burned in 1943, was built by Leo on the corner of Ocotillo and Ellsworth Roads in 1928. Larence cared for the store, and, Donald took care of the sheep and cattle part of the business. Leo managed the farm and produce operations. The farming operation employed several hundred workers during harvest times. Because there were no banks nearby and transportation was limited, it was nearly impossible to pay the laborers wages with checks. To solve the problem, the Ellsworth Brothers issued script money that could be used at their store. Coins were produced, and had the appearance of silver in 5, 10, 25, and 50 cent pieces. One side of the coin was stamped with the amount, and Ellsworth Bros. Stores was printed on the other side.

Our Lady of Guadalupe

It's the two narrow stained-glass windows that may have first attracted your attention as you passed by the weathered building across from Our Lady of Guadalupe in recent years. Even though obscured by afternoon shadows, their beauty often enticed a second look. They've since been removed and placed on display in Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. Mexican-Americans have played a vital role in the development of the San Tan area. These honest and hard-working families have contributed significantly to the rich heritage of the communities. We're told that many were isolated by language, cultural, and occupational barriers. Many were living in substandard housing and found the customs bewildering. But it was the families and farm laborers that moved to the Queen Creek area in the late 1920s and early 1930s that began, with the help and guidance of Father O'Hern, to organize the first Catholic congregation in the late 1940s.

By the early 1950s, the school district had acquired several wooden barracks from Williams Air Force Base for use as classrooms, the cafeteria, and an auditorium. The auditorium doubled as a facility for mass and for the visiting priest to hear confessions. Nuns would also teach catechism classes, usually during the summer. Although the congregation appreciated the use of the school buildings, they looked forward to a time when they could worship in their own church. So in 1960, the members started raising money for a building fund by selling homemade items, such as baked goods. Father

Patterson of Chandler helped with the purchase of property, and, Father O'Hern of Gilbert helped them acquire a barracks building from the Base. It was moved to the site on the north side of Ocotillo Road, 3/8 mile west of Ellsworth, and still stands today as a humble reminder of our history.

By 1975, the building was deemed unsafe, and the insurance company refused to renew the policy. New fund-raising efforts were started, many under the leadership of Lupe Coronado. And in 1988, land was purchased across the street for Our Lady of Guadalupe Church.



Educating our Youth

Growing communities and the need to provide more classrooms for our children is nothing new. A solution for many school districts in the late 1940's and early 1950's was to acquire old barracks buildings through the War Assets Administration. In a letter to the Queen Creek School District, dated July 23, 1947, "...your application for buildings located at the Marana Army Air Field¹, Marana, Arizona, has been accepted. The total Fair-Value of these buildings is \$630.00, which amount is subject to discount as a Public Benefit Allowance for educational purposes. The net amount due is \$85.50."

And in September 1949, several more buildings were acquired from the Florence POW camp² for use as classrooms, offices, an auditorium, and a cafeteria. Records show the purchase price for a single building was only \$50.25. We can see one of these in a photo of the old Rittenhouse School's playground taken more than fifty years ago.



Times have changed. In 1953: A loaf of bread sold for 16 cents; a gallon of milk, 94 cents. The second season of *The Honeymooners*, with Jackie Gleason, Audrey Meadows, Art Carney, and Joyce Randolph could be enjoyed while eating one of Carl Swanson's first TV dinners. The new car, that probably cost around \$1,850, could be driven around Arizona for 29 cents a gallon. And around the world in Nepal, Sir Edmund Hillary was making the first recorded climb of Mt. Everest.

The barracks are gone; but, the old merry-go-round and some of the other playground equipment from years-past is still available for viewing at Queen Creek's old Rittenhouse Elementary School, home of the San Tan Historical Society Museum.

The Marana Army Air Field opened in 1942 and was used as an air transport basic training school. In 1945, the base was deactivated. It is used today as a storage place for civilian planes. An internment camp for enemy soldiers captured during WWII - 13,000 Italian and German prisoners passed through from 1942-45.

Cluff House

Another link to our past makes way for the future.

Maurine Cluff has fifty-five years of wonderful and sometimes emotional memories from her life with family, friends, and neighbors in the place that until just recently, she has called home.

Built on the Germann homestead in the late 1930's, the house was originally along a dusty road, surrounded by a wire fence and hidden by palm and eucalyptus trees. Maurine remembers that she couldn't wait to move in, which she and Ivan did after purchasing 480 acres of land from Walter and Elsie Germann, in January 1949.

Ivan and good friend Stan Turley soon formed a partnership to farm the land on this west side of Sossaman, south of the railroad tracks. "Ivan could fix anything;" and, had an old used caterpillar tractor, float, disk, and plow. As partners, they borrowed \$8,000 from Stan's dad, to purchase an old diesel engine and convert it to natural gas as power for the irrigation pump. Electricity was being rationed, so they had to use something other than an electric motor. Stan's wife, Cleo, once commented that they really did start from scratch, "having about \$200 between the Cluffs and Turleys."

Ivan and Maurine put a lot of love into their home over the years, like many of us do, making improvements and adding rooms to accommodate their growing family. Trees hit by lightning, flowering hedges groomed to enhance the beauty of their property, a small air landing strip built across the road, historic artifacts discovered while clearing the land, pump engines so loud that they shook the house, and children boarding the school bus are just some of the sights and sounds that will remain forever in the memories of those that were lucky enough to call this their home.

This house is gone, but the lives it sheltered will always be enriched by its significance.



Monsoon Flooding

Monsoon season visits Arizona every summer, as it has for countless years. Dust, wind, and rain moves across the desert with an intensity that must be experienced to be appreciated and respected. The stories are endless, and sometimes seem unbelievable in an age of well-engineered drainage systems, paved roads, reliable phone and power services, cell phones, and SUVs.

In September 1966, classes at the Rittenhouse Elementary School were dismissed early and closed a following day due to flooding. Water was reported to be knee deep for a bunch of eighth graders seen trudging across the playground. Flood waters in August 1964 washed out a road berm, and left sand bars and channels across flooded orchards. This photo was taken of the water flowing across Crismon Road on August 19, 1954. An estimated 100 acres of carrots were destroyed, and a large section of railroad was washed away. A Ford pickup belonging to Nolan Ellsworth was also a complete loss.

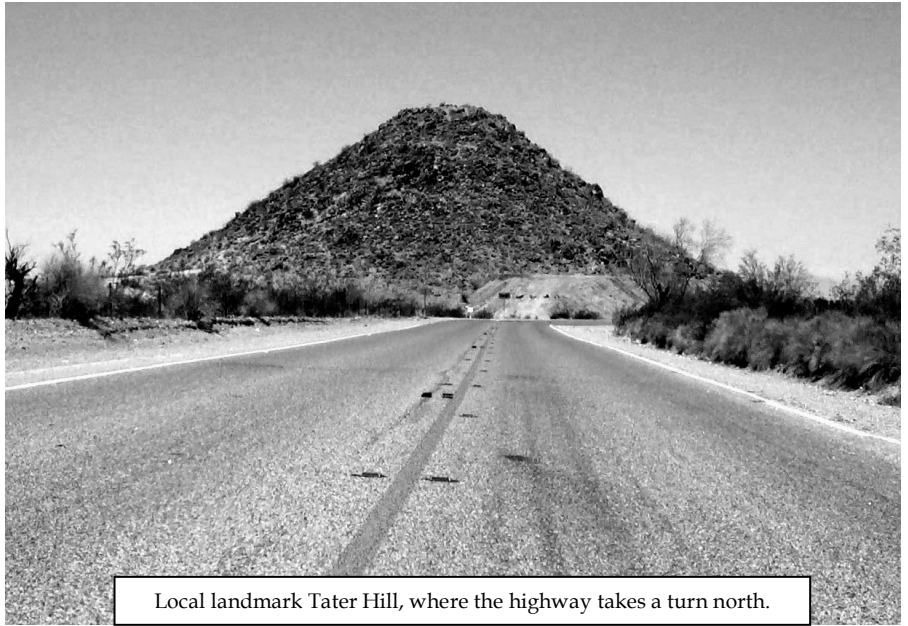


Some of the best recollections come from The Chandler Heights Weekly. In August 1943, “1.52 inches of rain fell...breaking a hot spell and furnishing a good irrigation to everyone.” It also helped to put out a fire in the Tonto National Forest which had burned over 3,000 acres. In August 1940, a Sunday afternoon rain transformed dry washes to raging torrents. “All the tomatoes and peas planted on the Fitzgerald ranch were washed away.” One day in August 1939, Queen Creek waters rose and for ten hours the road from Chandler Heights to Chandler was flooded for three quarters of a mile near the bridge over the canal. The roads north past the Power, Sossaman, and Germann ranches were also flooded. “The Leo Ellsworth’s lost 600 young chickens during the high water.”

Higley-Florence Highway

“When our auto turned at the Higley end of this new highway and started for Florence, the driver shifted onto the high gear and made the 35-mile home run in one hour and five minutes,” *Arizona Blade, February 1913.*

Just six months prior to this report, an automobile party composed of the Honorable Lamar Cobb, State Engineer; Jas. A. Parker, Assistant State Engineer; Geo. H. Binkley, of the Mesa Improvement Co., Chandler; Geo. T. Peabody, Secretary Chandler Chamber of Commerce; L.H. Sarey, Postmaster and merchant at Higley, and Oris Holdren, arrived in Florence from Higley by way of the old Silvestre ranch. The route skirted the foothills of the mountains, a range we now refer to as the San Tan Mountains; “...lying south of Webster station and north of Sacaton.” The party returned to Higley by the road that follows along the Arizona-Eastern railroad tracks. The purpose of the trip was to acquire knowledge of the topography of the country between Florence and Higley and the character of the surface material with a view to locating the most feasible route for the State highway between Phoenix and Florence. Mr. Higley proposed that if the State would locate the road directly from Higley to Florence, and clear the right-of-way, he would put on his teams and completely grade the road-bed from Higley to the Pinal county line without cost to the State.



Local landmark Tater Hill, where the highway takes a turn north.

And in February of 1913, another auto party left Florence for a run to Higley over the new State highway, which was just receiving the finishing touches, aside from the culvert work, which would be held in abeyance till a standard for State highway culverts could be decided upon. “Starting from the Florence depot, the new highway trends almost due west for about 25 miles, then turns at a right angle and goes seven miles due north to Higley railroad station, the present terminus of the highway. If it can be dragged just once more and rolled after the next heavy rain, it will be the finest 35-mile stretch of highway in the State, without a single exception.”



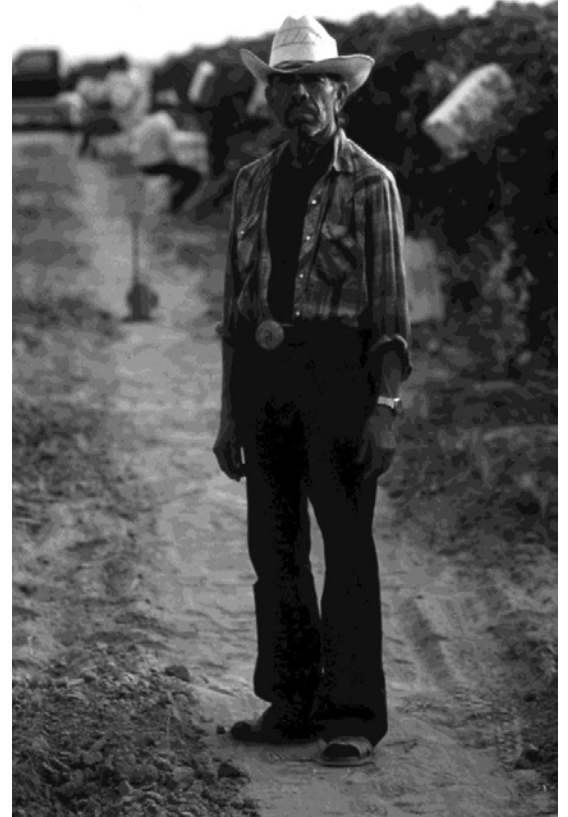
Higley Station

Farming and Agriculture

For Chandler Heights, Combs, Higley, and Queen Creek, the farm worker has played a significant role in agricultural production and in community development. During of the Mexican Revolution in the early 1900s, more families migrated to the Arizona Territory to escape the violence and to seek the opportunity to live a better life. Although some were educated, most were not and had to work as farm workers. Many were poor, their lives were hard, and they sometimes encountered a great deal of prejudice. We can take pride in knowing that the San Tan area is still home for many that moved here in the late 1930s – the Aldecoa, Trujillo, and Valenzuela families first working as irrigators in the vegetable and cotton fields.

During those first few years, when transportation was poor and there were no banks, wages were paid in script to be used in trade at the Ellsworth store. Only coins were produced, having the appearance of silver in 5, 10, 25, and 50 cent pieces. The amount was stamped on one side of the coins; on the other was printed Ellsworth Bros. The farm worker's children would attend the Rittenhouse School when there were no crops to harvest; but, were segregated into one classroom, regardless of age, until they learned English. Many of them dropped out of school when they reached the ages of ten and eleven, so they could work to help support their families.

According to an UFW white paper, wages of the more than two million farm workers in the US have failed to keep pace with inflation over the past twenty years, making it difficult and often impossible to afford the basic necessities of housing, food, health care and education for their children. Farm workers do back-breaking manual labor, and do not normally receive such benefits as health insurance, pension plans, and paid vacation; or even overtime pay for working more than eight hours per day.



Most estimates place the Mexican and Central American farm worker population at over 90% of all farm workers in the US. While most speak only Spanish, there is an increasing number who speak neither Spanish nor English but rather the native languages of the region from which they came. The fact that the vast majority of farm workers are non-white adds a dimension of racial and ethnic discrimination against them; not only in terms of employment practices but also in the relationships within the established communities in which they work

Antique Farming Equipment

What it is about antique farm equipment that catches our eye, causing us to pause for a longer look? Is it the rustic appearance? Or, that they are reminders of simpler times? Maybe these symbols of our history just trigger a curiosity, reminiscent of the lives of hard-working families.

One local farm, once dependent on equipment like the wagons, plows, and rakes that rest on the grounds of the historic Rittenhouse School museum, was Barney Farms. Newell Barney can recall a story about each of the implements he's donated to the San Tan Historical Society for display.

The freight wagon is very similar to the one his grandfather used to haul freight from Douglas to Safford. Grandfather Barney was among the colony of Mormons that settled in Mexico. Newell's father was a farmer in Safford, and when Newell was ten years old, he drove a mowing machine like the one on the museum grounds. He remembers that he was so short that he couldn't sit on the seat and reach the deck with his feet; so, he stood and leaned back against the seat for balance. Newell also remembers walking along behind the one-horse plow, dropping seed corn in the furrow that would be covered on the next pass. He and his wife, Katherine, made their home in Safford for a year and a half before coming to Queen Creek in 1949. The dump rake was used on their Queen Creek farm; it followed behind the bailer to pick up the hay that had fallen to the ground. The town of Queen Creek was quite limited when they first settled here. They bought the land as desert and cleared the brush and trees for the farming of cotton, grains, and potatoes - a huge undertaking. They made a little two-track road to get to their farm, which was two miles east on Queen Creek Road. Roads at that time were not named, and all directions were given as, "how far from the general store?"





QUEEN CREEK TOWN CENTER 1986

Information Courtesy of San Tan Historical Society
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QUEEN CREEK TOWN CENTER 2007

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QUEEN CREEK TOWN CENTER 2013

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